R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 017 436 RE 001 163

SPECIFIC VALUES OF A RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED ADOLESCENT.

BY- ROSS, SAMUEL B.

PUB DATE FEB 68

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.36 7P.

DESCRIPTORS- *ADOLESCENTS, *RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS, *LEARNING DIFFICULTIES, *EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS,

SOME OF THE VALUES OF A RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR THE DISABLED LEARNER INCLUDE A PREDICTABLE DAILY ROUTINE, PERSONAL ATTENTION, THE IMPERSONAL ATTITUDE OF THE STAFF, ORDER, AN ENCOURAGING ATMOSPHERE, A RIGOROUS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, AND CONCENTRATION ON SELF-CONCEPTS. ALTHOUGH THE BOARDING SCHOOL IS NO PANACEA FOR ALL THE PROBLEMS OF THE CHILD, FOR MANY IT IS THE ONLY ANSWER. THE COMBINATION OF A SOUND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM WITH AN AFTER-SCHOOL LIVING EXPERIENCE CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CHILD'S SUCCESS OR FAILURE. THE MOST CRITICAL ASPECT OF THE RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT OF THE ADOLESCENT IS THAT WITHIN THIS SITUATION THE CHILD IS AS HE IS AND IS GIVEN GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT TO ACCEPT HIMSELF. REFERENCES ARE INCLUDED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE 5TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES (BOSTON, FEBRUARY 1968). (AUTHOR/BK)

ED017436

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

SPECIFIC VALUES OF A RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED ADOLESCENT.

FEB 26 1968

This paper was delivered at the 5th International Conference of the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities - February 1968 - Boston, Massachusetts, by

Samuel B. Ross, Jr., Headmaster - Green Chimneys School, Brewster, N.Y.
Director of Program Development - Edwin Gould Foundation for Children

"From time immemorial, some children have found themselves without parents, and parent substitutes have appeared to take care of them. Whether these have been the good wolf of Romulus and Remus, the kindly peasants of Aegean fisherfolk, or the Pharoah's daughter, their work was cut out for them. The child had real urgent needs that called for a continuing response of helpfulness in every area of child raising. By nature, the human child is dependent and turns to responding adults for help and guidance. Where they have been prepared to understand and fulfill this need and provide for growth through dependence and maturity, the child has benefitted. In recent years, the reasons for children living away from home have changed. Fewer find themselves placed simply because they have been orphaned or deserted. More and more the child's placement stems from prescription which has followed diagnostic appraisal and a measured decision to remove a child from a damaging situation and place him in a therapeutic setting or one, at least, neutral."

Boarding schools can sometimes succeed where parents and day schools cannot, but boarding schools were financially feasible for few families until in some states tuition aid was granted to families where a residential program was deemed imperative. If this had not come to pass, many children would continue to underachieve throughout school and later."

Recently, Jerome Bruner stated that "School is away from home with all that fact implies in anxiety or challenge or relief." If this anxiety can be held to a minimum, the challenge and relief provided by

RE 001 163

the school can offer the child an opportunity for growth success, regardless of past experiences and failures. There are schools who state that they are not equipped to handle children with problems. Many times this is a fallacy, for "The treatment of children with behavior difficulties is hindered by incomprehensible technical jargon and conflicting diagnosis." If educators were to give this careful thought, they would conclude that many so-called "problems" are not problems at all, but are cases of mis-diagnosis and mis-handling. What might be indicated in such cases is the therapeutic effect of twenty-four hour care.

What is sometimes forgotten or maybe taken for granted is the fact that the structured routine of twenty-four hour a day care for many children is the ingredient that is needed to insure success. Frequently, because of the new state laws which permit tuition grants to families, I am asked to justify and show that my educational program is better than the public school where special classes are being conducted. It seems almost disastrous to allow oneself to get into this type of a dialog with fellow professionals for nothing is to be gained from such a discussion. The truth of the matter is that this is not the main purpose of the placement in a residential program. The specific value to the child is not the educational program or the group living program but rather the combination of the two. The total environmental milieu experience is the key to the success of this program.

What then are we talking about? In order to cover the subject as completely as possible in the allocated time, I decided to develop a list of advantages and will discuss them for you in no particular order but rather in the way they evolved as I prepared for today's talk -

1. There is good evidence that a predictable daily routine helps - of course this must be a routine that is wholesome and purposeful. There

would be a danger in having a scheme where there is a much too poorly determined and imposed routine. In comparison with the home, boarding school routine is less flexible yet it allows the child some freedom of choice free from emotional involvements with the family. Special training in the routine of daily living is given each student. This is considered equally as important as the classroom experience.

2. Each child is given a great deal of personal attention. Yet the child has the freedom of being away. Strange as it may be for some to accept, this provides the child with a less pressured living experience. Then, too, this affords the child much greater protection for the total campus life is under greater control and supervision. Any youngster, whether in trouble or not, in deep or mild disturbance or conflict, is likely to need help with many practical problems but what he needs most of all is help in understanding himself and his relation to others and society. He needs help in learning what his real feelings are. He faces what Friedenberg calls a crisis in the formulation of his own identity. The child's basic need is to learn enough about what he is really like and what he really wants and needs, to permit him to make intelligent decisions about how he wants to act with respect to the available alternatives. It is the goal of the residential school to provide the adolescent with the structure, warmth, acceptance, and opportunities for experiences which will enable them to resolve their conflicts and become integrated, self-acceptant human beings.

3. Children are sometimes balky and not very tractable. The impersonal attitude of the total school staff encourages change. Demands can be made more realistic. There are definite well established and understood limits and controls. There are fairly consistent rules with logical consequences to follow if the rules are not obeyed. Work is assigned

to all based on ability. Children can better accept these assignments if they note that others have to do likewise. The school is, therefore, training for independence.

4. The school is able to establish a modicum of order without crushing a child's creativity. Standards are developed in terms of a child's needs. In many families this is an area of frequent battling. It has been found that children can be motivated to respect order when they realize they profit from it.

5. Children respond positively in the encouraging atmosphere of a good relationship and a happy environment. The youngsters learn to play. There are established ways to control competition and enough variety of activities so that every child can find some area in which he can experience success. The school is able to provide companionship. A good talk with a close friend can solve problems or at least put them in perspective before they become overpowering. At home, school, family and neighborhood limitations add to the problem of the child. Sometimes there has been a complete lack of social involvement for a variety of reasons. The boarding school can easily correct this.

6. The total school living experience provides a rigorous educational program with discipline and follow through. The school is able to help the child learn to block out the irrelevant. It is a well-known fact that school achievement may well be affected by unfavorable environmental influences. The school maintains a program which permits less interruptions. There is an absence of things to take time other than the prescribed routine. Since the whole staff is committed to the program, the child finds himself in an environment where there is a strong academic attitude displayed by all of the adults.

7. Children come to boarding school with patterns of behavior which take a long time to change. Behavior modification then is an important aspect of what the school can offer. Toilet habits, bedtime and morning problems all fall within the framework of the boarding school responsibility. A social, moral and ethical code is more easily enforced.

8. Repeated failures gradually make the youngster apathetic or hostile to all learning situations. The school must, therefore, concentrate on the child's self-concept, self-image, and self-esteem. As this is improved, the child's anxiety is relieved and he can begin to work on his learning problems. The boarding school setting allows for greater experimentation and adapting the total program is much easier. This is indeed an advantage. The residential school, which is often independent and autonomous, is in a good position to innovate and utilize effectively the results of study and research. With less formal procedures necessary to start a new program, greater freedom by the administration to modify the program and the willingness of the faculty to try new methods, much can be accomplished. If the traditional methods are not the answer for a given child, then a new and more effective way of helping him must be found.

9. Many times we are dealing with children where the problem has been greatly effected by the parent-child relationship or sibling rivalry, or a variety of other things that occur in families, or for that matter, as the child goes to and from school. Sometimes there has been too much psychological stress. Sometimes the lack of control has resulted in the child not being able to accept any postponement. In the school there cannot help but be less comforts and the child certainly will learn the meaning of no. Many of these children suffer because they have been over gratified. This will tend later on to make them frustrated and even bitter.

According to prevailing psychoanalytic theory, adolescence ushers in an upheaval that reactivates old traumas and fixations. Even the healthy young adolescent must have another go at the oedepal problem and various identity crises. For the handicapped youngster the hazards are greater. Therefore, the peerships and the benign surrogate parents in the boarding school offer certain maturation supportive safeguards.

10. Sometimes the residential school realizes success due to the fact that the parents are relieved to have children off their hands so that interferences are controlled. The child recognizes this and is relieved himself to be out from under. Then too, in many cases the parent is bubbling with cooperation for he feels it is socially acceptable to allow the school to take over the responsibility of the maturation of his children rather than have the child develop anti-social behavior or delinquent behavior and end up in the hands of the court. While we are helping the child to modify his style of living, we must in turn, help the adult to understand what his role is. Many handicapped, as well as normal, children have been faced with adults who were unable to assume responsibilities as such. It is imperative to surround the child in his new setting with adults who can and will make decisions. In actuality, what we need to do is to foster mutual respect and understanding between child and adult. The child should know what the significant adults in his life expect of him, and they, in turn, must be trained to know what to expect of the child. Setting realistic expectancies for the child is necessary, and the adult must know how to react when the child does not conform to regulations and standards. Here, the sensitivity to the needs of the child is paramount, for without this there can be no growth.

The boarding school is no panacea for all the problems of the child but for many it is the only answer. The combination of a good educational program with a good after school living experience, can for some, make the difference between success or failure. If we are able to create for the child a good total program, we will come to see definite changes in the child. If the child is only able to benefit to the point where he exhibits social adequacy, then we will not have failed to have done some good. If, in the process, we are able to correct many of the child's educational deficits, we have then accomplished something where others have failed.

In conclusion, the most ciritcal aspect of the residential placement of the adolescent is that within this situation the child is as he is, is revealed to others and to himself and is given help guidance and support to accept himself and what he is, and is truly his own person. He is not overshadowed by his family, smothered by his family, hidden or protected by his family or made excuses for but he is, instead, faced with reality and helped to accept or change it.

References:
(1) Earl A. Loomis, M.D. - Address at the annual meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association, 1954
(2) Donald C. Ross, M.D. - Feelings - February 1966 - Vol. 8 #12
(3) Jerome Bruner, "The Will to Learn", Grade Teacher, February 1966